Review Article

Changing the Narrative. How New Technologies are Shaping the Sports Media Experience. The Case of FIFA World Cup

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Abstract

The FIFA Club World Cup 2025 this summer presents a major challenge for the coverage of this event, but not in the traditional journalistic pattern. In the ever-changing journalistic landscape, DAZN has introduced many innovative methods to bring soccer action to millions of screens worldwide. Perhaps the biggest challenge was to combine some traditional journalistic methods with AI, statistics and virtual reality. The platform has not only managed to broadcast the matches live, but also to create virtual spaces where fans can communicate and interact first-hand. Real-time chats, live reactions and social media engagement have helped people experience the FIFA Club World Cup 2025 in a completely different way to any other soccer event. The aim of this article is to show how this new technology has changed the landscape of sports journalism and whether citizen journalists and professional journalists can work together to achieve a new and very attractive result.

Introduction

Internet and the revolution in the field of mass media are changing everything, including the lives, work and working conditions of journalists and employees in the press [1]. We talk about a new media landscape, which, according to Leandros [2], give a new communication paradigm which has begun to emerge in the global media industry, with key features being the digitization of information, the convergence of newsrooms, mobile platforms, social media and audience fragmentation. Papathanassopoulos [3] considers the convergence of media as the most important event in the developments that have changed all the data in the field of communication [4,5].

This new ecosystem of information and journalism is changing radically and at a great speed. New media, new ways and vehicles of information dissemination emerge, creating a completely new environment and a completely new and chaotic landscape, in which traditional assumptions and hierarchies of information are overturned, leading to the emergence of a new reality. The outbreak of the global economic crisis in 2008, combined with the revolution that took place in the media industry, completely overturned the traditional business models of media. Newspapers gradually lost their loyal audience as well as their market value, while advertising revenues decreased, forcing many media companies to either operate online or adopt subscription models [1,4,5].

Researchers in the field [2,6-8] claim that the public played an important role in the developments and the new communication landscape. As a result, the journalist lost the role of the gatekeeper of news, which they now share with the public. The public can now interact and, in some cases, produce and distribute content. In recent years, a new disruptive technological development was added that has been radically changing the landscape of the media ever since. This is artificial intelligence, which is transforming not

SHRINE PUBLISHERS
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Shrine Journal of Research and Sciences (SJRS)

ISSN: 3069-2032

Volume 2 Issue 2, 2025

Article Information
Received date: October 20, 2025
Published date: November 05, 2025

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DOI: 10.65070/SJRS.2025.811

Keywords
New media; FIFA Club World Cup; Soccer; Sports journalism

only journalism and labour relations, but the whole society. In some cases, journalists share this role with the machines, which can now produce journalistic content [4,5].

It is a fact that the Press is facing a deep structural crisis due to the internet, which is now largely covering the needs of information, a field that was previously covered by newspapers and other media. Speaking about the changes that have taken place in the information landscape, Rigou [7] emphasizes that they concern both the level of content production and labour relations within media organizations. Pavlik (2000) observes that technology has affected journalism in at least four broad areas: the way journalists do their job, the content of news, the organizational structure of newsrooms, and the relationships between news organizations and their audiences. That is a new reality that Anderson, Bell & Shirky [9] call post-industrial journalism, a term that, as they explain, means that journalism is no longer organized as it used to be.

On the contrary, it is entering a phase of restructuring, in which new ways of producing news prevail. Consequently, existing media organizations will lose revenue and market share, if they do not take advantage of the new working methods, processes, and potential offered by digital media. This restructuring has led to the re-examination of every organizational aspect of news production, as well as to the reduction in production costs, cutbacks and layoffs, which journalists around the world are experiencing. In combination with the global economic crisis that began in 2008, media organizations closures, job losses and the flexibilization of labour relations have increased dramatically in the media industry.

New Forms and Ways in the Covering of Sports Events

As we described above, journalism is affected by rapid technological change. The internet with its new channels, platforms and tools has created a new and rapidly changing media environment. Those changes have contributed to an ever-increasing pace of innovation. The digitalization of news media has enabled changes in news production as well as in news consumption [10-12]. The new media landscape requires not only adaptation to the digitalization of the respective product, but also the offering of a new experience. A lived experience that is made possible by the participation of the audience in the entire process. Journalists not only produce content [2,6], but can also receive feedback, interact with the audience, make changes and adjustments.

One of the fields where the new media landscape is being implemented is the field of sports events, where there are now new forms and ways to cover. Social media now has millions of users around the world, and their development has brought about significant changes in information, distribution and access to news content. At the same time, emphasis should be placed on the use of mobile devices, which are now widely used for access to social media, news and television content. New generation mobile phones favor this new trend. The access of the users to the news through mobile phones and tablets and in general to digital content becomes very easy and at any time through the mobile applications [13].

Also, according to Papathanasopoulos [14], the television ecosystem is changing rapidly, and television is becoming a media with new possibilities for consuming audiovisual content and converging with other media, offering new possibilities for public participation. Papathanasopoulos [14] adds that analysts and experts in the field of communication agree that the current dividing lines between media soon will become obsolete. These dividing lines between the media have been removed by the internet which has led to the convergence of the media. The internet and social media are tending to remove the dividing lines in television, which is something that significantly changes the way television content is distributed and creates new data in media companies. Citizens watch less and less TV in the traditional way or watch less and less traditional TV. This happens in almost all age groups, but especially in younger ages. In recent years, with the rise of the internet, live streaming broadcasts have developed. With the development and evolution of Web2, this type of broadcasting has expanded through social media and in this case, we are talking about social streaming broadcasting. It is now common for an event to be broadcast on television in the classic way and at the same time broadcast live through the internet (live streaming) and even through social media (social streaming) or only live through the internet or social media [4,5,13].

These kinds of broadcasts, web and social streaming, are very famous in the field of sports broadcasts, in which television plays and continues to play a very important role. According to Antonopoulou [15], television and sports develop a bidirectional relationship, on the one hand television plays sports as a spectacle for consumption and evaluates it in terms of commercialism, and on the other hand sport claims to become more commercial to attract the interest of the media. There are many sports events and especially Mega Events that support their commercialization and increase their revenue from television viewing. Antonopoulou [15] also says that TV stations invest huge amounts for television rights of sports events and on the other hand, sports are one of the most important financial blood donors for television. Now, developments are leading big brands in the field of communication and technology to invest huge amounts in TV rights. From London 2012, the Olympic Games have also been transformed into a social media event, especially in TV rights and TV broadcasting. Some of the most important social media like

Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat have started to broadcast and produce TV content and to make agreements for that, not only in Olympic Games, but in many other sports events. Twitter started from 2016 to produce TV content and broadcast games from the main sport championships of the USA like National Football League (NFL), National Basketball Association (NBA) and Major League of Baseball (MLB) and made agreements with sports TV networks like ESPN and Fox Sports to broadcast sport content [4,5,13,16,17].

Emphasis on sports broadcasting is also given by Facebook. The social media giant started to broadcast sports events in 2016 following Twitter movements. It made agreements with ESPN and Fox Sports to broadcast sport content on Facebook Watch. One of the most important agreements for Facebook was the one with Fox Sports in 2017-18 to broadcast the European Champions League in the USA. Also, Facebook has made an agreement with La Liga to broadcast the Spanish soccer championship in India and the Indochina Peninsula also with leagues like NFL [4,5,13].

Facebook also started cooperation with famous ex swimmer and Olympian athlete Michel Phelps in the Olympic Games of Rio 2016. Phelps announced during the Games -he won five gold and one silver medal in Rio 2016- the last race of his career firstly on Facebook Live and then on the traditional media. That was a video with almost 4 million views and for that announcement Phelps signed a 200.000 dollars contract with Facebook [13]. Snapchat also turned to TV content distribution in agreement with TV networks. The social media, which has great access to young people and the United States, had entered a major sports broadcast deal with NBC for the Summer Olympic Games of 2016 in Rio de Janeiro and the Winter Olympic Games of 2018 in Pyongyang. It was the first time in its history that NBC, rights holder for the Olympic Games until 2032, agreed to share television footage of the Olympic Games and did so through social media. With this agreement, among other things, NBC made a very significant opening to young people. Also, it had more revenue than the Olympic Games in London 2012, even though the ratings it recorded in Rio in 2016 were lower than those of the London Olympics in 2012 with the classic (cable) way of broadcasting. The ratings were lower, but the advertising increased due to live or social streaming [4,5,18-22].

The ability to live stream an event gave the social media juggernaut the audience engagement and participation it needed to also become a media colossus. Therefore, those in charge of Over The Top (OTT platforms) quickly saw the opportunity to not only make a profit by producing or broadcasting sporting events, but also to fulfil a need that not many customers had at the time [13]. But in the age of digitalisation, the most representative topic of such a discussion is the use of AI and its generative content. The entire journalistic process of collecting, creating, disseminating and consuming news is changing dramatically, not only in terms of speed, but also in terms of the quality of the news [23-25]. Artificial intelligence automates traditional tasks for journalists to free up time for another story or even to enrich the articles already produced. This leads us to believe that AI can not only be more productive than the human factor but can also save time and distribute more content to the audience faster [26].

One other development in covering sports events, is the use of virtual and augmentation reality. These new techniques which were used by some media for the first time in the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014, today are widely used by many media outlets around the world. It is used mainly by television stations to cover sports and competitions. For example, NBC has aired a combination of virtual reality video in collaboration with Vox Media. In addition to NBC, virtual reality and augmentation reality were used by other TV stations to cover the 2018 Winter Olympics. One of them was Al Jazeera and another was Eurosport, which since 2018 has bought from the IOC television rights for all European countries, an agreement that is valid until the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris. One of the pioneers in using augmentation reality in covering sport events is the Washington Post. At the Olympic Games of Tokyo 2021, in collaboration with Lede Lab, it created an experimental video series on three sports (skateboarding, surfing and sport climb) being contested in the Tokyo Olympics. The series unveiled on Monday focuses on three young American stars which competed in the games: and the users were able to experience what they liked of the competitors in these events, thanks to augmented reality. They could scan the QR code within the stories on their phone cameras [13].

AI has already been used by the media to cover sporting events. A very vivid example of a media complex that uses AI content in sports is Associated Press. As Triantafyllou, Panagopoulos and Kapos note [27]: “The AP now makes extensive use of this system, which can produce about 4400 reports in four months. Thus, it validly and quickly covers a wide range of facts. It also covers sporting events, including all US baseball leagues, i.e., 142 teams in 13 divisions and 10,000 games per year” (p.4). From the above, we can draw the conclusion that with the automation of journalists work using AI will come virtual editors [4,5,28,29], and news anchors [27]. Among the pioneers in the use of AI in covering sports events is The Washington Post, which makes extensive use of algorithms in its online edition, especially in the coverage of sport events and important events, such as the Rio Olympics in August 2016 [4,5,27].

The AI technologies have been used for many years in FIFA World Cup events. The American Fox Sports used the innovative The FIFA World Cup Highlight Machine in the 2018 World Cup, which was available through the FoxSports.com website and the Fox Sports App application, in collaboration with IBM. This was an application, IBM Watson, which contained highlights from all World Cups since 1958 and allowed users to search for match highlights by searching for the video they wanted based on facial features, red cards, words of the commentators, etc. The same was true of the games of the World Cup in Russia, the highlights of which were entered into the platform after they ended [30]. In essence, the IBM Watson platform was an automatic Metadata producer. It contained a huge amount of video footage from 300 World Cup matches from which users could watch the moments they wanted and create their own video from moments of various matches. For example, someone could ask to see a player's goals from all the World Cups he had scored [30].

The London Times made another breakthrough with the help of artificial intelligence during the 2018 World Cup. In collaboration with Amazon, they offered a daily podcast (audio) with action and news of the day. This podcast was called Alexa Times Sport and was free and did not require a subscription to listen to. The user simply had to say the phrase "Alexa, launch Times Sport" to listen to it [30].

Le Figaro created a tool with the help of artificial intelligence to automatically generate visual summaries with graphics for each match of the World Cup. The summaries, called Mondial Stories, were ready within five seconds of the final whistle of each game, a time when it was impossible for a human to create a complete match summary and even with graphics. The Mondial Stories consist of five different cards or screens that provide information about possession, yellow cards, possession of the ball and everything else needed to have a complete knowledge of each match [30]. The Mondial Stories were available to all users through the Le Figaro mobile application through the Sport24 mobile application (Le Figaro's sportswear). After the group stage, in the knockout games, summaries were sent only to those who had registered with the service, while in the semi-finals and finals they were sent to the entire sports news subscriber base. The summaries were fully automated, while the platform was neutral and objective and did not favor any team, as Le Figaro officials reported [30].

The FIFA Club World Cup 2025

The FIFA Club World Cup2025 was not only a sports event, but it was a full-scale trial of testing news technologies. A sport event which can reshape everything in covering sports events, from refereeing to real-time data and even stadium security.

The FIFA World Cup 2025 has become a living lab for the future of football [31]. FIFA has harnessed the aforementioned technologies of the new age and tried to apply them to the new football project, the FIFA Club World Cup 2025. And indeed, the truth is in the numbers. Almost 2.5 million people also attended matches in person during the month-long extravaganza. FIFA's official website, FIFA.com, recorded 16 million visitors in June. The FIFA Club World Cup 2025 app was downloaded one million times in the same month, while the WhatsApp channel for the campaign grew to 4.4 million followers. By delivering engaging content to the audience, 2.7 billion impressions were generated across all platforms. The opening was also a big surprise for football fans, as searches on the internet increased tenfold and the game was trending on Google. The deal with DAZN, which streamed all 63 matches free of charge, contributed to this. With regard to the media and television coverage of the event, FIFA provided the following information in its official statement: "Nearly 1,500 Host Broadcast staff have contributed to the delivery of some 1,900 hours of non-live content on the Media Server, while 224 press conferences were conducted by the clubs.

The FIFA Club World Cup 2025's inclusive nature is reflected in the 184 different nationalities among the 68,526 accredited people involved in official capacities at the tournament, all of whom have helped entertain and inform the more than two million fans who have attended matches… Technology providers Lenovo have over 9,000 devices and accessories in use across all stadiums and tournament sites, and there were more than 1,500 Hisense TVs providing action replays during the group stage" [32].

In the next chapters, we will look at the new technologies used at the FIFA Club World Cup and how their use has changed the sporting experience:

AI and the sports experience

The use of new technological methods and generative AI content can offer many advantages. First and foremost, it improves the stadium experience because there are larger venues, more spectators and the mix of AV technology, LED walls and 360-degree sound systems can provide better quality for the microphones, but also the speakers don't distort the sound. There are also signs that inform the audience in real time about the services on offer. The next item on the list is the improvement of transmission and streaming options. 8K cameras offer ultra-high-definition content and interactive action. Replays from multiple angles, real-time stats and second-screen content will enrich the viewing experience. AV will also help media and journalism as it will support live and remote content. It will allow them to produce interactive features and topics so the viewers can interact with the

content, e.g. with statistics, replays from different angles, comments on the interviewers and interviewees via a live chat on social media [33]. The new generation of broadcasting, 8K cameras, in a World Cup begun in 2018 in Russia. The big advance at the 2018 World Cup compared with the 2014 World Cup in Brazil is that each match is covered using seven 8K cameras versus five and that HDR became part of the experience [34].

In addition to these initiatives for a greater fan and journalist experience, the role of the second screen also plays a role. Generation Z and millennials are at the top of the list as the most multitasking and demanding fans. These generations represent the new norms of sports viewing and understanding. This view is by no means apathetic. According to Deloitte's report entitled "2023 sports fan insights: The beginning of the immersive era", based on a sample of 3,004 sports fans in the US, 56% of fans surveyed (GenZ, Millenials, GenX, Boomers, Matures) said they would rather watch this event on a streaming video service than cable or TV because they had a better experience. 77% of sports fans (Gen Z and Millienials) said they engaged in at least one additional game-related activity while watching a sporting event from home. These activities included looking up stats, using social media, watching another game on another device, betting and playing fantasy sports. Another interesting finding from the Deloitte report was the use of VR during live games. More specifically, "Sixty-two percent of Gen Z and 66% of Millennial sports fans said they would pay to watch a sporting event in real-time from an athlete's point of view in VR. In addition, 59% of Gen Z and 65% of Millennial sports fans said they would pay to watch a sporting event in VR from the seat of their choice at a venue". Based on the above, it would be an interesting case study to explore how a journalist can fully utilize VR to broadcast an event. Would this be possible and if so, what are the challenges, pros and cons, capabilities and incapabilities of a broadcaster in such a project? The Deloitte survey underpins the argument of changing norms for the sports experience. When asked how sports consumption will change in 2030, 67% of fans said it will be more interactive, 57% said it will be more accessible and 54% said it will be more immersive than before. On the other hand, the majority (72%) of fans believed that this will only come at a high price for purchasing such services.

Real-Time Match Data and Analytics

AI is going to give a big bust to stats. This happened in FIFA Club World Cup 2025, the first tournament that AI automatically logs nearly every on-pitch action in real time. Player movement, sprints, tackles, passes, and shot trajectories are captured by camera feeds, wearable tech, and ball sensors—processed instantly and displayed via dashboards for coaches, commentators, and fans. Tactical adjustments can be made mid-game, broadcasters can explain key moments more clearly, and fans get a richer, more interactive experience. The FIFA's partnership for that was the Football Technology Centre AG, which built-in anomaly detection and quality checks, the system is both fast and accurate. It's not just about collecting data—it's about making it meaningful [31].

Enhanced Semi-Automated Offside

The enhanced semi-automated offside system powered by a network of high-speed cameras, sensors embedded in the ball, and algorithms developed with Hawk-Eye, this system tracks player positions and ball movement in real time. The result? Near-instant offside decisions with a margin of precision down to 10cm [31]. Gone are the days of long VAR delays or players sprinting 40 yards only to be halted by a late flag. The older version of semi-automated offside technology, introduced during the 2022 World Cup, still relied on video officials to manually validate every offside call, even when the system had high confidence. That meant slower decisions, more interruptions, and inconsistent application across matches. Now, with the enhanced 2025 version, clear offside calls are flagged automatically when the margin exceeds 10cm, allowing for instant decisions without human validation. Tight or marginal calls still go to the VAR for review, but the overall process is faster, more consistent, and far less disruptive to the game's flow. This new version has already been tested in tournaments like the FIFA Intercontinental Cup and youth competitions. Based on its success at the Club World Cup, it's a strong candidate for inclusion at the 2026 World Cup [31].

Referees Body Cameras

Among the innovations in FIFA Club World Cup 2025 were the body cameras of the referees and live referee reviews. These innovations will enhance fan experience, transparency and operations. The footage will be used by FIFA Club World Cup 2025 Exclusive Global Broadcaster DAZN as part of live match broadcasts during the tournament. One of the main goals of this test is to explore whether the new camera angle can improve the experience for those watching on television and online by showcasing the referee's perspective. Furthermore, FIFA will use the findings from the tournament to create guidelines for the use of such cameras in football. Besides broadcast developments, fans following the action at the stadiums will now also benefit from seeing exactly what the referee views on the monitor in the referee review area during on-field reviews. The footage will be displayed live on the giant screens, which will make it easier for fans to

understand the decision-making process and enhance transparency [35].

Creation of FAST Channels

One of the most innovative models for streaming are the FAST Channels. They combine ad-free television at any time with the commercial potential of programme- controlled and digital advertising, without you having to pay a subscription fee. In the USA in particular, over half of households use such channels. According to Joe Nilsson and Amory Schwartz [36], co-founders of C15 Studio, the trend is towards pure streaming TV. This is particularly logical, as viewers want to be able to access content at any time and from anywhere. Looking at this trend in the sports sector, it could have an impact on the traditional pay-tv model and sponsorship. This could lead to further investment in campaigns, in sports products, in better negotiation of rights for broadcasters and distributors and in improving the sports experience. The only thing sports rights holders need to do is to rely on FAST Channels and also invest in storytelling, live coverage, etc.

Khan [37] estimates that around 118 million people will be streaming their favourite sports by the end of the year. One challenge for FAST platforms is the ability to produce high-level content without much delay and at no cost to the audience. At this point, the complexity of such a project should be emphasized. First of all, the content, which comes from all over the world and in different languages, must be prepared correctly so that it appeals to fans and is also profitable. When it comes to the sports experience: "Media brands can utilize cloud-enabled versioning tools to deliver custom ad profiles and tailored graphics, audio, and local language commentary to meet the diverse needs of a global audience." Imagine a football match in which different camera angles capture the moment a goal is scored, and which is broadcast in many different languages with absolutely crystal-clear picture and sound.

Live content is the most engaging and attention-grabbing content and will not only help FAST platforms grow their audience but also bring financial benefits to their owners. In conclusion, Khan explains that platforms that want to be competitive should look to the future, and the future is live streaming.

The catalogue of concerns about FAST platforms includes not only the quality of content on offer, but also the risk of advertising overload, which can reduce engagement or alienate audiences. The repetition of certain adverts or the presentation of adverts that are not tailored to the viewer's needs and preferences can "kill" viewer interest. With the globalization of media, the need for free entertainment is increasing, which means to look forward to a larger share of the streaming audience (Tec-Direct Media).

A concrete example of a FAST channel is the FC Barcelona channel called TOP BARÇA. Those responsible at FC Barcelona have set themselves the goal of a) monetising video content and tapping into revenue streams by distributing the team's curated content via streaming platforms, b) increasing global reach through multilingualism, as the content is not aimed at the Spanish population but is intended to open up new markets and c) simplifying the creation, management and distribution of live and on-demand content [38]. As for multilingualism, we should mention the cultural significance. The content can be even more engaging if it is shown in the viewer's native language, as it can then be fully understood by viewers of all school levels. With this practise, the Club shows that it respects the traditional heritage of all countries and continents of the world. Fair access to digital content should be a given for everyone, especially using AI [39].

Conclusion

The FIFA Club World Cup 2025 was not just a simple football tournament. It was a test event for the FIFA World Cup 2026 which will take place in USA, Canada and Mexico (11 June-19 July) and of course, for another future sports events. FIFA applied many new things and innovations and used the Club World Cup as a controlled environment to evaluate how well these technologies perform under real-world pressure. But the Club FIFA World Cup 2025 could very well be the blueprint for sport's digital evolution and the use of new technologies in covering football and sports. The 2025 FIFA Club World Cup might be remembered for something even bigger. This tournament could mark the beginning of a new era—one where AI works together with media, referees, coaches, and fans to make the game smarter, faster, and fairer [40-45].

The use of new technological methods and generative AI content can give the media and in particular sports media a new dimension in covering sports events. The use of 8K cameras offer ultra-high-definition content and interactive action with replays from multiple angles, real-time stats and second-screen content will enrich the viewing experience. Al will help media to give a high-quality content and to support live and remote content. It will allow them to produce interactive features and topics so the viewers can interact with the content, e.g. with statistics, replays from different angles, comments on the interviewers and interviewees via a live chat on social media. The creation of FAST channels, even the enhanced semi-automated offside and the referees body cameras can improve the content which reach to public via media and can improve the way that media inform the citizens. All the developments support journalism, in particular

sports journalism, and improve the quality of the information. Finally, all these developments are shaping a new experience for the sports media and sports journalism.

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